

GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION RESPONSE

(online submission, deadline 24th September 2024)

Proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/proposed-reforms-to-the-national-planning-policy-framework-and-other-changes-to-the-planning-system>

Chapter 5 – Brownfield, grey belt and the Green Belt

Q20: Do you agree that we should make the proposed change set out in paragraph 124c, as a first step towards brownfield passports?

Agree

Subject to proposals being acceptable in terms of the context of the area, and meeting all other policy requirements, and subject to the “settlements” referenced in the policy being in sustainable locations that are not reliant on use of motor vehicles for day to day needs.

Q21: Do you agree with the proposed change to paragraph 154g of the current NPPF to better support the development of PDL in the Green Belt?

Disagree

The term “not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt” alone is open to wide interpretation and could lead to development that is out of keeping with the prevailing form and character of an area.

Q22: Do you have any views on expanding the definition of PDL, while ensuring that the development and maintenance of glasshouses for horticultural production is maintained?

Expanding the definition of PDL in the NPPF to include hardstanding and glasshouses is not supported. This creates an obvious opportunity for hardstanding to be laid and glasshouses to be built in order to support a planning application for other development including housing. Many glasshouses are also sited in unsustainable locations.

Q23: Do you agree with our proposed definition of grey belt land? If not, what changes would you recommend?

Disagree

The definition is too vague. Land that makes “a limited contribution to the five Green Belt purposes” is open to too wide interpretation. There is a risk that predominantly

open sites and sites of importance and sensitivity to a local community could be defined as “grey belt”. Land within Conservation Areas and Local Green Spaces should be excluded from grey belt designation.

Q24: Are any additional measures needed to ensure that high performing Green Belt land is not degraded to meet grey belt criteria?

Land which has been neglected or deliberately damaged should be exempt from grey belt classification. Caution should be taken that land of a particularly suitable use class is not easily lost to less suitable uses (example equestrian land adjacent to existing bridleway network, or a valued recreational space within or close to a settlement area).

Q25: Do you agree that additional guidance to assist in identifying land which makes a limited contribution of Green Belt purposes would be helpful? If so, is this best contained in the NPPF itself or in planning practice guidance?

Agree

Clear guidance is necessary. This would be best summarised in the NPPF but set out in detail in separate guidance.

Q26: Do you have any views on whether our proposed guidance sets out appropriate considerations for determining whether land makes a limited contribution to Green Belt purposes?

The considerations are vague and open to too wide interpretation. Clearer criteria should be set out. This should include provision for the value of the land to the local community, and recognition that aesthetics of land are only part of the consideration.

Q27: Do you have any views on the role that Local Nature Recovery Strategies could play in identifying areas of Green Belt which can be enhanced?

Strategies that identify locations to improve nature and provide other environmental benefits are supported. Engaging local communities at an early stage in the process would help identify areas of Green Belt which can be enhanced.

Q28: Do you agree that our proposals support the release of land in the right places, with previously developed and grey belt land identified first, while allowing local planning authorities to prioritise the most sustainable development locations?

No comment to make.

Q29: Do you agree with our proposal to make clear that the release of land should not fundamentally undermine the function of the Green Belt across the area of the plan as a whole?

Agree

Q30: Do you agree with our approach to allowing development on Green Belt land through decision making? If not, what changes would you recommend?

Disagree

In its proposed form, the criteria is too vague and would likely lead to an influx of speculative applications. If the grey belt designation is to proceed, land should be identified at the plan-making stage only.

Q31: Do you have any comments on our proposals to allow the release of grey belt land to meet commercial and other development needs through plan-making and decision-making, including the triggers for release?

The contributions to be secured for commercial or other development (as per NPPF paragraph 155 infrastructure and green space improvements) do not appear to be over and above existing policy requirements.

Q32: Do you have views on whether the approach to the release of Green Belt through plan and decision-making should apply to traveller sites, including the sequential test for land release and the definition of PDL?

Green Belt release should be via plan-making and not decision-making as per the response to Q30 above. Policy should reflect the need to prevent an over-concentration or under-supply of any one type of residential accommodation in a local area. Traveller site planning must also contribute to the achievement of sustainable development, and not be located in areas at high risk of flooding.

Q33: Do you have views on how the assessment of need for traveller sites should be approached, in order to determine whether a local planning authority should undertake a Green Belt review?

No comment to make.

Q34: Do you agree with our proposed approach to the affordable housing tenure mix?

The Parish Council supports a balanced range and mix of housing to match very local needs. Policy approach should be sensitive to possible undesirable effects of an over-concentration of any one type of housing in a localised area. While additional provision of more affordable housing is welcomed, the exact mix of tenures should have sufficient flexibility to ensure local needs are met.

Q35: Should the 50 per cent target apply to all Green Belt areas (including previously developed land in the Green Belt), or should the Government or local planning authorities be able to set lower targets in low land value areas?

The 50 per cent target should apply to all Green Belt areas.

Q36: Do you agree with the proposed approach to securing benefits for nature and public access to green space where Green Belt release occurs?

Agree

The secured benefits must also be tangible, provided in perpetuity, and above and beyond those ordinarily required as part of a development scheme.

Q37: Do you agree that Government should set indicative benchmark land values for land released from or developed in the Green Belt, to inform local planning authority policy development?

No comment to make.

Q38: How and at what level should Government set benchmark land values?

No comment to make.

Q39: To support the delivery of the golden rules, the Government is exploring a reduction in the scope of viability negotiation by setting out that such negotiation should not occur when land will transact above the benchmark land value. Do you have any views on this approach?

No comment to make.

Q40: It is proposed that where development is policy compliant, additional contributions for affordable housing should not be sought? Do you have any views on this approach?

As the policy states 50% affordable housing is a minimum and therefore policy compliance could presumably be anywhere between 50-100%, this question is unclear.

Q41: Do you agree that where viability negotiations do occur, and contributions below the level set in policy are agreed, development should be subject to late-stage viability reviews, to assess whether further contributions are required? What support would local planning authorities require to use these effectively?

Agree

This appears to be a sensible approach, but also raises the question of what would happen if a developer were to claim at a late stage that a lower contribution would be appropriate. For local planning authorities such additional reviews will obviously carry a cost of additional staffing hours and training.

Q42: Do you have a view on how golden rules might apply to non-residential development, including commercial development, travellers sites and types of development already considered 'not inappropriate' in the Green Belt?

It is suggested that further benefit be sought in the case of non-residential development due to the fact that one of the criteria (at least 50% affordable housing) does not apply.

Q43: Do you have a view on whether the golden rules should apply only to 'new' Green Belt release, which occurs following these changes to the NPPF? Are there other transitional arrangements we should consider, including, for example, draft plans at the regulation 19 stage?

It would seem appropriate for draft plans at the regulation 19 stage to be allowed to progress without additional delay. However, it may be appropriate to introduce a reasonable time limit, and also consider whether plans rejected as unsound/unlawful may become subject to the new arrangements when making the required revisions.

Q44: Do you have any comments on the proposed wording for the NPPF (Annex 4)?

No comment to make.

Q45: Do you have any comments on the proposed approach set out in paragraphs 31 and 32?

No comment to make.

Q46: Do you have any other suggestions relating to the proposals in this chapter?

It is suggested that clarification be provided as to the role Neighbourhood Plans may play in the proposals concerning brownfield, grey belt and the Green Belt, as the proposed revisions may create policy conflicts.

There may be localities where a relatively high percentage of Green Belt land could be considered to be "low quality". Concern is raised that potential broad-brushing or over-use of grey belt designations could lead to undermining and fragmentation of the Green Belt overall, and a detrimental effect on some local communities.

It is suggested that the risks of more speculative planning applications coming into the planning system be assessed.

Policy should recognise that some existing "low quality" Green Belt areas have the potential to be redeveloped as nature habitats, green spaces for communities, playing fields, flood mitigation, or may unlock walking routes, accessibility, permeability and active travel opportunities.

While a greater focus on affordable housing is welcomed, even the discounted homes are often not affordable according to average local incomes.

Concern is raised that the proposed Green Belt reforms may begin to address housing challenges but exacerbate other issues, including increasing emissions, deterioration of the countryside and natural environment, loss of land for food production, and declining physical and mental health of rural communities. The Parish Council shares the view of CPRE, the countryside charity, in calling for a joined-up approach to the Green Belt to tackle these issues in an interconnected way.